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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1941

SUBJECT: "CHRISTMAS FOOD PACKAGES." Information from food specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Every year many gifts of homemade food go through the mail. But this year will probably make a record because so many of the boys at camp will be getting food from home.

Right now is not a day too early to get your food package in the mail if you want your boy to have it on Christmas Day. As you know, the post office asks that Christmas packages be in the mail even earlier than this. Food gifts deserve a little leeway because food must arrive fresh to be at its best. But if you mail your package much later, it may become a New Year's gift instead of a Christmas present.

The success of any food gift depends both on the food and on the packing. You wouldn't like to have your boy, with a big Christmas appetite for Mother's cooking, wait in vain for food that leaked or spilled, was crushed or broken, or fell out of its wrappings en route. That's what happens to a lot of food gifts in spite of all the careful directions of the post office. Every year people try to send food tnat won't ship well, or they don't pack the food properly.

Food specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture have some tips to give you about good choices in food for the box you send this year. They advise sending food that can stand shaking and knocking about; heat and cold; and as much as a ten days' wait in the mail. And they say to avoid fragile delicate food that will break up easily, or greasy, sticky or moist food unless it is packed to travel in safety.

Ask the post office about sending perishable food before you decide to

include it in the food box. Never try to send any food that might spoil in the mail. Even if your boy loves your fried chicken or custard pie better than any food on earth, don't try to ship these in his food box in the regular mail. Fried chicken or custard pie that must wait a couple of days near the radiator in the post office won't be safe to eat when it arrives. Your boy may hanker for some of your pie, but pie is very fragile and difficult to ship. Before you pack chocolate, cheese, doughnuts, or any food that may drip grease or melt when hot, plan to pack them in tight containers that will safely hold melting grease. Jams, jellies, homemade fruit juices make welcome gifts, but they also need to go in sealed jars or cans, packed in shaved wood or shredded paper and in heavy cardboard or wood boxes. You know how carefully glass jars, or bottles, or tin cans are packed for shipping at the factory. You need to pack them just as carefully when they are sent from home. Finally, remember to use stout cord, and plenty of it, tied tightly on the outside of the box.

So much for precautions. Now for some of the foods to put in. Think first of the foods your boy liked best at home. Any of his favorite foods that will ship well naturally deserve first place in his Christmas box. Maybe he has written you how he misses your homemade bread or chocolate cookies. These will be among the thoughtful gifts for his box, provided it doesn't have so far to go that the bread and cookies will get stale.

Here are other suggestions for food for his box. Salted and spiced nuts in tight waterproof bags or tight tin boxes. Nut bread, nut cookies, or even a sealed jar of homemade nut butter, packed for safe shipping. When you send bread, wrap it first in waxed paper and then in corrugated paper or in a cardboard box. Cookies travel best wrapped separately and then put in a tin box or firm cardboard box. Fill in any spaces in the cookie box with soft paper so the cookies won't shake into crumbs. The softer cookies ride better than crisp snappy cookies or soft

crumby cookies. So your box might include those chocolate squares called "brownies", or drop cookies like those called "rocks", or date bars. Honey cookies are good, too, because they don't dry out easily.

Your boy probably wants some kind of cake at Christmas. And the traditional fruit cake ships best of all. You can send the cake in the inexpensive pan you baked it in, or you can wrap it in wax paper and then in cardboard. To be extra thoughtful wrap a little inexpensive knife and send along with it.

Dried fruit or any of the dried fruit candies ship well. Raisins, dates stuffed with nuts or fondant, sugared and stuffed figs, or a mixture of dried fruits put through the food chopper and then molded in balls and rolled in powdered sugar--all these are ideal for a Christmas box. Candied fruit travels well, too. You can make candied apple slices this time of year, or candied cranberries, or candied orange or grapefruit peel. Any of the homemade candies like fudge that aren't too fragile, too brittle, or too soft for traveling also might go in the box.

Then as we mentioned before, you can include in the box small jars of jam, jelly, marmalade or cheese, if you make them safe in the midst of shredded paper in a corrugated box. Send a little spoon along for convenience.

Last tip: Be sure your food gifts look attractive as well as taste good and travel well. The screw tops of jars will look extra cheerful if you paint them Christmas red. And when you tie up the different little packages to go in the big box, tie a bit of evergreen or holly to suggest the decorations back home.

That's all the news about the food box for today.

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